

Verklemt by edelweissroses

Category: Doctor Sleep (2019), IT (Movies - Muschietti), The Shining (1980)

Genre: ...sort of, Angst, But Not a Soulmates AU, But not THAT sort of clownery, Crossover, Crossover Pairings, Dan "Danny" Torrance Lives, Dan "Danny" Torrance has PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Disabled Dan "Danny" Torrance, Don't come in expecting the clown, Eventual Smut, Fluff, Human Pennywise (IT), I mean there is clownery afoot, Idiots in Love, M/M, Past Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Pennywise and It Are Two Different Entities, Personal Growth, Remember kiddos this an AU Pennywise, Shining!AU Pennywise (IT), Smoking, Soulmates, Well... Somewhat Human Pennywise (IT)

Language: English

Characters: Abra Stone, Billy Freeman, Dan "Danny" Torrance, Pennywise (IT)

Relationships: Pennywise (IT)/Dan "Danny" Torrance

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-11-20

Updated: 2019-11-28

Packaged: 2019-12-19 02:58:00

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 5

Words: 10,883

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

"Everyone has their addiction, Doc," Pennywise took a long drag of his cigarette, "Ghosts don't choose who to haunt. They latch onto whoever shines the brightest, sink their claws into your skin, and make you notice them. But, you... you get to choose how to forget."

"Is that what you're doing?" Dan asked, "Forgetting?"

"Yeah," he looked over his shoulder, blowing smoke into the air, "Because I'm the ghost, Doc. And I've sunk my claws into myself."

1. The Meeting

The event happened five years ago.

Pennywise had been sleeping. It seemed that all that he did back then was sleep. He had just lounged in his bungalow wasting away his days down in humid Loxahatchee, doing little more than sleeping, smoking... and feeding.

He enjoyed the swamp. He enjoyed slithering through fields of sugarcane and frightening the locals. Over time, he'd learned to enjoy becoming an urban legend. He enjoyed swimming amongst the alligators, channeling his inner *Muck Monster*, and waiting patiently underneath the water for a *shining* child to come and throw down a fishing line. He had everything he could ever wish for... but it wasn't enough.

Until the event happened.

Something had awakened, and it wasn't the beast that stroked down the inside of his sternum.

There had been a beacon in the sky. A light that had shined so bright that it had pierced the atmosphere, shooting straight up into the stars, demanding that the universe stopped and witnessed it.

Blood had dribbled down his chin when he'd looked up from Georgie's corpse. He remembered how quickly he'd abandoned his prey. He remembered feeling so entranced, *pulled* instead of *pushed*, by the light that he had stepped out from underneath the bridge he'd been feeding under and stared.

Fear.

Fear of the purest variety.

Fear so powerful and pungent that he had been able to *taste* it from thousands of miles away.

It had nearly knocked him off of his feet. That fear, that pure unadulterated *terror*, had been stewing for such a long time that it

had been distilled, like a barrel of whiskey ready to be popped and poured. He'd felt drunk off such moonshine.

He hadn't seen a shine or tasted such decadent fear like that since... since...

Pennywise had pulled himself out of the drainage ditch.

He had run through the fields. He had kicked down the door of his bungalow. He had gathered his stuff into a duffel bag, stuffed a cigarette between his teeth and fled in the dead of night back out into the wilderness.

And he hadn't stopped searching until now. Not until he had reached the source of such fear and dazzling light from all those years ago. Not until he had reached Colorado, deep down in the mountains where the first spring flowers bloomed...

Where Danny Torrance was building a hotel.

Dan swung down the axe.

But instead of the firewood splitting nicely in half, it just burst into smithereens instead. Dan grimaced. He tossed the charred and smoking pieces into a pile of its brethren and brought another log onto the stump, determined to get it right this time around.

He swung down the axe.

Place. Swing. Discard.

Sweat dripped down his neck, traveling down his spine and drenching his back, making his shirt stick to his skin in all the wrong ways. Sometimes, Dan wished that he could be one of those people who could lose themselves in their work. He wished that, through the mere act of repetition, that he could put himself into a meditative trance where all his worries drifted away. But, much like when he'd tried out yoga with Billy, Dan discovered that he just thought way too much.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered watching his best friend place the bottom end of a deer rifle underneath his chin and pull the trigger.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered finding Abra gone and the silence that had followed.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered the searing pain pulsing through his leg after Rose had gotten the better of him, feasting upon his fear... his *agony*. He remembered the ghosts of the Overlook and how they had swarmed him minutes after, feasting on his *shine*.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered the brush of the flames, the touch of his mother's hand.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered waking up in the hospital.

Place. Swing. Discard.

He remembered waking up, thinking that his name was *Jack*.

Place. Swing—

Drop.

Dan stood there, hands empty and trembling from the nerve damage he'd sustained from nearly being burned to death in a fiery inferno.

When he'd been recovering in the hospital, the Ute people of Colorado had swooped in and reclaimed the land where the Overlook had once stood. They had burned everything that had remained into ash. They had removed every trace of the darkness that had cast a shadow upon their land. They had torn down the maze, planted trees in its place, and rebuilt the burial mound that had been long-defiled by rich settlers and their greed.

The hotel was dead, gone, and buried. Not even the ghost of it remained; and yet, it still haunted Dan.

The Overlook had taken so much from him already. It had taken his father, his innocence, his sanity... hell, it had almost taken his life. The hotel had ripped and sucked and drained until there had been nothing left to take but the emptied husk of his skin. But, even then, it had demanded. But, even then, it had *wanted*.

But, no more.

Now, it was time for the Overlook to give back.

So, after having requested an audience with the Ute and receiving their blessing to rebuild the Overlook further away on land that didn't contain the bones of their ancestors, Dan had put himself to work.

And he hadn't stopped once since the year he'd started.

He closed his hands into fists, or rather, as closed as they possible could nowadays. Everything about him had changed after the fire. His body, his mind, his *shine*. Much like how he couldn't close his hands all the way anymore, Dan found that couldn't hide himself away either. He was shining brighter than ever before.

While freeing, it also brought some unsavory characters to his door regardless of whether the welcome mat was unfurled or not.

Dan picked up his axe.

He tightened his grip, spun around on his feet, and threw it at the tree where he'd felt eyes prickling at the back of his neck.

Whatever it is you came here looking for, I'm not in the mood. Turn around and don't come back.

The tall figure that *looked* human, but most definitely *wasn't*, stepped out into the clearing. His red jacket burned into the back of Dan's eyelids; but, it wasn't him. He was dead. Jack was dead. This was someone else. This was—

Pennywise, the name entered his mind sooner than he could ask, the answer to an unspoken question.

“Oh, but it looks like you’ve been working so hard,” the creature — Pennywise — grinned, eyes shining bright while a sharp grin twisted across his lips, “And don’t you know? *All work and no play makes Doc a **very** dull boy.*”

2. The Introduction

Dan froze.

It was inevitable that one of the Steam-Stealers would have come and searched him out again. After all, Rose the Hat herself had claimed that she was far from the last; and, after their final battle had been waged and won, the light that had shined from the Overlook that night had been sure to attract attention.

Abra had searched for the others. Most were on other continents, some more closer to home. Dan had warned her of the risks, but she had just looked him straight in the eye and said that she'd feel more comfortable knowing where they were. She wasn't going to be surprised again. Dan had found himself unable to argue with that.

But Abra hadn't warned him of Pennywise.

No one had seen him coming.

Because he wasn't a Steam-Stealer.

"I am the Devourer of Souls," Pennywise confirmed, slinking forwards, "I am the Moth drawn to the Flame. I am the Eater of Fears, the Waster of Worlds, the Seeker of Shines. You called to me."

Dan stumbled backwards, but Pennywise's hand was already wrapped around his throat.

"And I came."

Dan thrust out his arm and pulled the axe to him, pressing the blade up against Pennywise's cheek.

"What do you want?"

"Whatever you want, Doc."

Dan's grip wavered.

"You're not here to..." he said slowly, "...to eat me?"

"I never said that," Pennywise purred.

His Glasgow smile stretched further than humanly possible. The scars that flared up from the corners of his mouth and up his cheeks split at the seams, revealing rows upon rows of sharp teeth. His eyes shined bright yellow.

"I've been feeding off of you for five whole years, Doc. You're irresistible. I've never tasted such sweet, decadent..." he sucked in a breath, his eyes rolling into the back of his head, "...*fear*."

Dan shivered.

"I've followed you all the way from Florida," Pennywise leaned closer, "I've wanted you. I've hunted you. I've craved you."

He licked the side of his face, and Dan swore that it was longer than it should have been.

"And I'm yours."

Pennywise released him and bounced backwards.

Gone were the teeth. Gone were the shining eyes. The scars had sealed up and his grin was nothing less than normal, if not touched with a taste of mischief.

"Aren't you going to show me to my room?"

Dan lowered the axe.

"Your... room?"

"Well, allow me to rephrase: if I'm going to be staying here, then I ought to have a room, now shouldn't I? It would make everything a little easier," Pennywise said slowly, as if spelling it out for a child, "I'll settle for a hammock if you have one. Bed would be better."

He cast his golden gaze around the exposed foundations and unfinished ground floor of the hotel.

"Although, my expectations for one are... reasonably low."

“Hey!” Dan rested the axe on the ground now, blade-side down, and leaned against it for support, “I’ve been doing my best with what I’ve got.”

“You’ve had five years, Doc,” Pennywise drawled.

“Yeah, and three of those years were spent in a hospital. And the other two? Those were for securing the permits for the place,” he nodded over his shoulder, “These things take a while.”

“Not if you have help.” Pennywise spun on his feet, turning his back on Dan. “Now, where’s my room?”

“You’re not staying here.”

“Is this how you’re going to treat all your hotel guests, Doc?”

“You’re not my guest!”

“Oh,” Pennywise glanced over his shoulder and purred, “So, I’m just special then.”

Dan didn’t know how to respond to that. Hell, he could barely believe that this was even happening. Some self-proclaimed *Fear-Eater* had been tracking him for over five years completely under the radar, arrived on his doorstep vaguely threatening that he was going to eat him, and now he was just... what? Inviting himself over for dinner?

Got any iron?

Dan flinched.

Sorry, your Uncle Dan is... uhh... kinda busy at the moment. Can I get a raincheck?

Abra’s spiritual projection was wearing an oversized Harvard T-Shirt and a pair of RWBY lounge pants with matching headwrap. She must have already been home in bed or, rather, her dorm room. She’d just started her first semester there not too long ago. What was her major again? Criminal Law?

Evolutionary Biology and Neuroscience, Uncle Dan. Double Major, Abra

answered with a proud grin and cast her gaze upon Pennywise, *I think he's a fairy.*

Abra!

*No, I mean a **fairy**-fairy. She rolled her eyes and counted on her fingers, Emerged from the forest. Talks weird. Don't know if he's flirting or threatening. Gave you a false name. And now he's inviting himself over into your home? Total fae behavior.*

How do you know he gave a false name?

Abra raised an eyebrow.

Uncle Dan, do you really think that this guy's parents took one look at their bouncing baby monster and named him Pennywise?

Yours named you Abra Rafaella Stone.

Touché.

Abra casted one last lingering look at Pennywise before stepping closer to Dan. She slipped her arms around him and rested her cheek against his shoulder. Somehow, she missed everywhere the burn scars reached. Somehow, Dan knew that was on purpose.

If you need help, Uncle Dan, say the word. I'll be there.

I can handle this by myself, Abra.

I know, she smiled, her form disappearing, But you don't have to.

She was gone.

"What's this over here?" Pennywise's voice echoed through the lot.

Dan shook his head and placed his full attention back on his unwanted guest. His guest that had apparently found his personal lodge and was currently trying to open the front door—

It slammed shut, locked from the other side before Pennywise could finish a blink.

"That's my room," Dan's upper lip curled over his teeth. He lifted the axe back up and stomped over, stepping between Pennywise and the door. "You're not staying there."

"Touchy. Touchy." Pennywise backed up, raising his hands in pure, abject innocence, "And where do you suppose I go?"

"Where were you sleeping before?"

"The woods."

"Then go sleep in the woods!"

Pennywise stepped backwards. He looked down into Dan's narrowed eyes for a long time, for what felt like an entire lifetime but could have been only mere seconds, before slowly lowering his hands. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette.

"You really don't want to be near me," he stuck it in between his teeth, "Do you?"

"What I want," Dan swallowed and pointed the axe back towards the surrounding forest, "Is for you to leave."

"Fine."

The cigarette lit up by itself. Pennywise turned around.

"I won't bother you any further."

Dan tossed another log into the crackling fireplace and collapsed onto the couch. He leaned forward with a soft grunt and rested his elbows on his knees, rubbing his temples. Today had been a long day.

Mraow.

"Hey there, Azzie," Dan mumbled out an exhausted greeting and rested his cheek in his palm. He reached over, joints flaring up in protest, and scratched between the cat's milky white ears, "Rough day for you too, huh?"

Mraow.

“Yeah, I feel you.”

He sighed and leaned back, knocking his head against the wall.

“The world’s making less and less sense every day,” he grabbed the bottle of his medicated lotion from the side-table and popped open the top, “Or maybe I’m getting less and less sane. Maybe I should start keeping the axe in a safe?”

Dan rubbed his hands together. He massaged the lotion into his skin, his scars, his aching joints and slipped on the gray compression gloves that his doctor had given him three years ago. Abra had popped open a fresh green sharpie she’d purchased from the hospital gift shop and had drawn little green ghosts with smiley faces over the fabric. Dan couldn’t bring himself to wash them out.

He closed his eyes and sighed.

Pennywise.

What had brought him here and why? Dan already knew part of the answer. He had summoned him with his fear, his shine, the night that the Overlook had burned down and Pennywise had wanted to consume it. What Dan didn’t quite understand was why Pennywise *hadn’t*. By all means, he had had every opportunity to do so. He was unlike anything he had ever faced before, enough to have even flown underneath Abra’s radar, and yet... he had left all because Dan had wanted him to.

He wasn’t like the Steam-Stealers.

That didn’t necessarily mean that Pennywise wasn’t a monster; but, perhaps, there was more to him than what meets the eye.

Dan reached over to pet Azzie.

Only to find her gone.

He sat up ramrod straight and looked behind him.

The window had been left ajar.

Dan pushed open the front door with his shine and bolted outside.

“Azzie!” he called out. His voice sounded more desperate than he would’ve liked, but he was scared. Azzie was all that he had left of his previous life. If he lost her too...If he lost her like Billy then... then...

“Azzie! Azzie, where are you?!”

A soft mew answered from behind the lodge. Dan rounded the corner.

“Azzie—”

Where he found Pennywise in the middle of lifting his cat into the air by the scruff of her neck, his inhuman mouth stretched open wide.

The trees surrounding them trembled. The ground beneath them cracked. A sharp shudder traveled down the mountainside and threatened all those that trespassed to turn around and flee while they still had their own two feet to do so.

Drop her. Now.

Pennywise’s mouth slammed shut and promptly released Azreel, raising his empty hands into the air shortly after. Azzie, as if not knowing that she had just been seconds away from being turned into this monster’s dinner, weaved between Pennywise’s legs purring.

“What were you thinking?” Dan went to run his hands through his hair, but stopped himself before he could, “Azzie never did anything to you.”

“In my defense,” Pennywise drawled, “I didn’t know she was yours.”

“That doesn’t make it right!”

“Hunger can make you do strange and unusual things when the ache grows strong enough, Doc,” he lifted his chin, “You already know that.”

“Then why...” Dan ground his teeth together, “...didn’t you eat me?”

Pennywise froze.

“I beg your pardon?”

“You said that you were a Fear-Eater, didn’t you?” Dan’s hands trembled, not because he was scared or in pain... but because he was furious, “You had your chance to devour me. I wouldn’t have been able to stop you. But you didn’t. Why?”

Pennywise slowly let his arms fall.

“You really don’t know.”

“Know what?” he seethed.

“*This.*”

Pennywise wrapped his hands around some invisible thread in front of him and *pulled*. Dan fell forward onto his hands and knees, having felt that pull as if a pair of gloved hands had wrapped around his spine and tugged. He looked up, barely making out a silver string glimmering in the moonlight connecting them together.

“This is the reason, Doc,” Pennywise said quietly, “It’s like I told you before. You called for me... and I came.”

3. The Conversation

Dan poured himself a glass of chocolate milk; and, by that, he meant that he dumped a packet of cocoa powder into a mug and poured milk over the top. He grabbed a glass straw from one of the drawers, mixed it together until frothy, and sprinkled an ample amount of cinnamon over the top. This was the way that his mother had made him chocolate milk growing up, and he wasn't about to go changing it up anytime soon.

He stepped into the dining room and pulled up a chair.

"Are you sure you don't want some?" Dan asked his... ugh, *guest*.

"I'll take a shot of Clément, if you have some."

"The strongest drink you're ever going to get under this roof is the one you see right here," Dan reached into his pocket and pulled out a gold sobriety coin, "Alcoholic. Got my ten-year chip three months ago."

"Huh," Pennywise leaned back in his chair and pulled out a pack of Muratti cigarettes, "Good for you."

"Mmm," Dan took a long sip, "But we're not here to talk about me. We're here to talk about you."

Pennywise grinned, sticking a cigarette between his teeth.

"My favorite subject."

Dan leaned forward seriously, crossing his arms over the plastic table-top. Pennywise's grin wavered; yet, he still managed to cup his hands around his cigarette and light the end with his shine. It would've been suave if it had been anyone else but Pennywise.

"What's your name?"

"I already told you—"

"You're saying that your name is Pennywise?" Dan's brows raised

deep into his forehead, “Seriously? That’s what you’re going with?”

“Penn for short. Penny if you’re nasty,” he exhaled smoke through his nose and looked up at the ceiling, “My real name is Edward, if that’s what you mean. But, if you start calling me Eddie, you and I are going to have words.”

“So, you’re telling me...” Dan stated slowly, “You *chose* to be called Pennywise?”

“Ah ah ah,” he wagged his finger, “You need to reach a Level Five Relationship to be granted access to the tragic backstory. We’ve only just reached Level One.”

Pennywise’s grin spread so wide that the edges of his scars cracked.

“Level Three is sex.”

“We’re not in a—”

Pennywise looped the invisible string around his finger and *tugged* , nearly sending Dan flying across the table. Thankfully, he’d managed to brace himself in enough time that he didn’t. But still... ow.

“That doesn’t mean anything,” Dan steadied his chocolate milk.

Pennywise took a long drag of his cigarette.

“Means something.”

“I’m not even—”

“You so sure about that, Doc?”

*Are you so certain that when you look at me, you don’t feel **anything**? Come, come now, Doc. Here you are, sitting me down at your table underneath your hand-lain roof, forcing truth from my lips when you can’t even admit what you feel to yourself.*

Pennywise jerked forward and grabbed his chin. He lifted the cigarette from his lips and blew whispery rings of smoke around Dan’s face, never once breaking eye contact.

You've bottled up your fear. You've bottled up your shine. What else have you been hiding?

"Stop that." Dan pushed him out of his head and away from him. He stood up, pacing back and forth like an animal caged and on display. "What I feel is irritation."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, Doc," Pennywise leaned back in his chair, "Though I could help you with that, if you'd like—"

"Do you want to go back into the woods? Because this is how you get sent back into the woods."

Pennywise raised his hands.

"No more funny business. No more of this charade. I'm fifty-years-old. I don't have time for mind games, for monsters, for... whatever," Dan rubbed his wrists, "I want the truth."

"What happened with your hands?"

"What?"

"Your hands. The little appendages connected to your wrists. You keep rubbing them," Pennywise said, "They were hurting you too earlier today. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Dan crossed his arms over his chest, hiding his hands underneath his armpits, "Stop distracting me."

"But you're so easy to distract, Doc."

" Pennywise. "

"Alright, fine," Pennywise lifted the cigarette from his lips and blew the smoke into the air, "My name is Edward Weiss. Don't bother looking it up, there's millions of me. Just not as good-looking. Came to the States from Germany with only \$14 in my pocket back in, oh... let's say 1835. That sounds about right."

1. Did he just say 1835?

“Joined the circus up in Maine for a bit,” he continued as if he hadn’t just revealed that he was over 200-years-old, “Was their resident psychic for a while before they forced me onto clown duty. Managers said that no one wanted my predictions. I said that they were as accurate as they were going to get. But, apparently, no one wants to know that they’re going to die an early death in a fire or bleed to death in childbirth. They wanted me to lie. To say that they’d live a long life and die rich, no matter what the future had in store for them.”

Pennywise sucked on his cigarette.

“We were prepping for a show when an asteroid or something fell from the sky. Never did figure out what it was,” he wrinkled his nose, “That’s when I met my buddy here.”

“Your buddy?” Dan repeated.

“Yeah, Tippet,” Pennywise flicked his scarred cheek, “Tippet, introduce yourself.”

Pennywise’s mouth opened. His scars unraveled. His golden eyes rolled all the way back into his head, much like they’d had earlier that morning. Rows upon rows of sharp teeth stretched backwards like a monstrous flower unfurling until Dan could see the back of his throat where three pulsating lights shined, circling and circling... drawing... him... c l o s e r...

He felt himself walking forward.

Pennywise closed his mouth.

“Tippet says hi.”

“You’ve got an alien creature living inside you,” Dan breathed and collapsed back down into his chair. He ran his hands through his hair. “Guess Tony’s not that weird anymore.”

Pennywise choked on his cigarette.

“You’ve got another person living here?”

"No, uh...", he put elegantly, "Tony—Tony was my imaginary friend that lived in my mouth back when I was four or five. I used to spend hours and hours talking with him. I'd tell him about the latest Bugs Bunny cartoons, and he'd tell me the future. Didn't really change until my dad—"

Dan cleared his throat and tapped the corner of his head.

It's how I made sense of all this.

...Oh.

"So," Dan leaned back in his chair and took a long sip of his chocolate milk, "You're an immortal that preys on people's fears. I thought you said that we had to have a Level Five Relationship to unlock the tragic backstory."

"That's not the tragic backstory," Pennywise purred.

"Still," he continued, "How does all that play into you being here and now? How is any of that relevant?"

"You're the one that told me that you didn't want to play any games, Doc. I'm telling you who I am and how I got here," Pennywise leaned forward, "Five years ago, you shined brighter than every star in the sky, and the fear you exuded... I've never smelled anything like it before. I had a taste, and I wanted more. At first, I was coming to eat you."

"So you've said."

"Let me finish," he held up a hand, "I was coming here to eat you... but the second you threw that axe towards me, *this* sprung up."

Pennywise ran his finger down the invisible thread connecting them together.

"Now, I don't know what exactly this is... but what I do know is that I can't leave."

"And you can't eat me," Dan stated.

“Yes, and I can’t eat you,” Pennywise rolled his eyes, “Is that really all that you can focus on?”

“Says the person who wanted to *eat me*. ”

“I’m trying to be nice here, Doc!” Pennywise flopped back into his seat and took a long drag of his cigarette, “Look. The way I see it, we’re stuck together. Now, you can either make me leave again and force me to live outside in the woods like a dog you want to ignore that keeps coming back home. I’d advise against it, but it’s your choice, Doc. Though let me just say that I’m patient. Really patient. I can wait centuries if I need to.”

He blew smoke into the air.

“Or...” Pennywise locked eyes with him, “You can let me shack up here with you. You’d get an extra pair of hands to help you with your hotel, and we can figure out what this string of destiny-thing is together. Either way, the ball is in your court.”

“Do I really have a choice in the matter?” Dan pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Everyone does, Doc.”

Dan sighed.

“How do you feel about the couch?”

“It’s no hammock,” Pennywise grinned, “But it’ll do.”

The next morning, Dan felt like he’d been hit by a bus. He stumbled out of bed, gasping for air.

The doctors had prepared him for life with the scars. Medicated lotions, anti-itch ointments, pain medications, skin grafts, compression gloves, and a whole lot more. What they hadn’t prepared him for was the psychic mark that it’d left on him.

Dan had almost died.

Technically, he already had. Three times he had went into cardiac arrest. Three times he had been ripped away from his mother's embrace. Three times he had been saved. Fortunately, Dan didn't remember much after the first one. He had been a little too busy phasing in and out of consciousness, in and out of death. But he swore that he had heard someone screaming. Even worse, he swore that he had heard *Tony* answering.

He didn't know what he had done. Everyone refused to tell him. Even Abra couldn't look him in the eye after he'd asked. He could say without a doubt, though, that waking up in restraints had been more of a shock than discovering that half his body had been burned to a crisp.

And the pain... oh God, the pain...

Dan forced himself to his feet.

He stumbled into the bathroom, slamming into the sink. He flipped open the medicine cabinet. He popped off the cap from the bottle of Pregabalin. He switched on the faucet, drank straight from the tap and swallowed. But relief was never instant.

Dan sank onto the floor.

He needed to practice his stretching. He needed to keep his scars from getting stiff. He needed to medicate, to heal, to protect his skin. But would it really make any difference whether or not he rested... just this once... just for a little while...

Azzie hopped into his lap, purring.

"Alright, alright," Dan flopped his head back into the wall, "I'll grab you some food. Just... give me a minute."

He rubbed his hands over his face and forced himself to stand up.

Azzie weaved in-and-out from between his legs, meowing impatiently. Dan grabbed himself a long-sleeved shirt from the bottom of the laundry basket, using the new dressing stick that Dr. Dalton had sent over earlier that month to pull the fabric over his head.

Ah, so that's why he couldn't avoid stretching in the morning.

He rubbed the back of his aching neck as he moved into the living room, passing by an empty couch—

Wait.

"Rise and shine, Doc!" Pennywise spun around in the kitchen, spatula in hand. A luxurious scarlet red robe, of which Dan vaguely remembered as a Christmas present from Abra and Lucy, was secured around his waist with a thinly looped sash.

"I made pancakes," he grinned, flipping the evidence, "Whipped cream is on the table. Syrup is over in the fridge. Speaking of, you really ought to take better care of your health, Doc. You're fit enough to throw an axe at my face, but eating nothing but ketchup packets really can't be all that healthy—"

"That's mine."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That robe," Dan pinched the bridge of his nose, "It's mine."

Pennywise arched a brow, "Do you want me to take it off?"

"Yes, please."

"Alright, fine." He set down the spatula and started undoing the sash, suddenly revealing that he wasn't wearing anything underneath. "If you insist..."

"Wait! Wait." Dan slammed his eyes shut, tight enough to produce stars and their constellations twinkling behind them. He was seriously regretting getting out of bed this morning. "On second thought, I think it'd be better if you just... uh, left it on."

"Oh," Pennywise grinned, "But, Doc, I don't want to intrude."

"I insist."

"Well," he tied the sash back around his waist and fixed himself back

up, “If you insist.”

“Thank you,” Dan groaned. He headed into the dining room and took a seat, hiding his face between his hands. “It’s too early for this. Or, maybe I’m just too old for this. Wait, nevermind. It’s too early *and* I’m too old for this.”

“You know, I’m not typically the betting type, but I would’ve laid down big money pinning you as a boxers man. At the very least, briefs. Not a lounge pants and long-sleeved shirt grandpa. Leaves everything to the imagination,” Pennywise hummed, “Personally, I prefer sleeping in the—”

“I can see how you prefer sleeping,” Dan breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth, “If you’re going to be living here, you need to keep yourself covered. I don’t want Abra popping in and seeing something that she doesn’t need to see.”

Pennywise flipped the pancake.

“You have a daughter?”

“Niece,” Dan corrected, “Well, not blood-related but... she’s family.”

“I see.” Pennywise turned off the stove and brought the plate of pancakes over to the table, sliding it in front of Dan. He lounged back in his chair and grabbed his pack of Murattis. “Eat up.”

“You only made enough for one.”

Pennywise glanced up at him as he lit his cigarette. “I don’t eat what you eat, Doc.”

“Oh.”

Dan looked down at his plate. Pennywise’s pancakes smiled up at him, bearing wide grins much like the ones that Abra used to draw whenever she’d talk to him through the chalkboard. He didn’t know how to respond; and yet, something strange tugged at the corner of his lips, not a smile but... *something*.

He picked up a fork and knife and sliced into it.

“Do you need anything for your face?” he asked around a bite. They were pretty good for someone who didn’t eat normal people food. “Do they itch?”

“Hmm?”

“The scars,” Dan clarified, shoveling in another piece, “I’ve got a cabinet full of care products in the back. Help yourself to whatever you need. Well, except the actual prescriptions. I’m nice, but not that nice.”

“I didn’t know you had scars, Doc.”

Pennywise’s eyes were wide and his cigarette hung limp from his lips. His gaze dropped down to Dan’s hands. His *gloveless* hands. Dan dropped his fork and knife and hid them underneath the table.

“Shit,” Pennywise put out his cigarette, “Tell me where they are and I’ll grab them for you.”

“What?”

“Seriously?” he pushed back his chair and headed towards the bedroom, “Just because my scars are on display 24/7 doesn’t mean yours have to be. I’m inconsiderate, but not that inconsiderate.”

“Wait,” Dan grabbed his arm.

Pennywise captured his gaze and slowly allowed Dan to guide him back into his seat. Neither of them moved. Neither of them breathed. Neither of them did anything for a long while... that was, until Pennywise took Dan’s hand into his and placed it back onto the table. It was only then did he break eye contact.

Dan allowed himself to be inspected. The burns. The discolorations. The raised bumps and grooves and indentations that would, no matter what he did or how well he took care of himself, never go away. These were wounds that could never heal. These were scars that would never disappear. These were ghosts that could only be... managed.

Pennywise touched his fingers to Dan’s wrist.

“Do they hurt?”

“Yes.”

Pennywise’s traced along his life line, or rather, where it would have been if he still had one.

“Are there more?”

“Unfortunately,” Dan grimaced.

“Can I see them?”

“That’s a Level Three Relationship question.”

Pennywise grinned.

“The sex level.”

“Wait, no,” Dan pulled his hand away and took back up his fork and knife, pointedly not looking at the other end of the table, “Which one was the one with the tragic backstory?”

“Level Five,” Pennywise winked, “Comes after Level Three.”

“Oh.”

Silence bloomed between them.

“Dan—”

“There needs to be some ground rules established between us. I can’t have you living here doing whatever you want, when you want, wherever you want it,” he interrupted, “I agreed to your terms. You get to stay here while we figure everything out. But I need some structure.”

“You mean aside from not walking around naked?” Pennywise leaned back in his chair.

“That’s rule number one,” Dan cut into his pancakes, “Rule number two is not eating Azzie, or anyone that comes over here for that matter.”

“I need to eat, Doc.”

“I’m aware of that,” he swallowed and went in for another bite, “Consider that an incentive to get this solved sooner rather than later.”

Pennywise grimaced, but didn’t say anything.

Dan continued eating his pancakes.

Pennywise grabbed his previously abandoned cigarette and lit it back up with his shine. He tapped his fingers impatiently across the table.

“Well?”

Dan looked up.

“Well, what?”

“Usually there’s a rule number three at the end of these things,” Pennywise scoffed, “Rule number one: don’t walk around naked. Rule number two: don’t eat. Rule number three: I don’t know, don’t murder me in my sleep?”

“Nope,” Dan stuffed another piece of pancake into his mouth, “First two are all I need.”

“God, Doc,” Pennywise snorted out a laugh as if he’d just heard the punchline to the funniest joke, “You’re *hopeless* .”

4. The Building

Dan had never been one for morning yoga.

He never could understand the wide-spread appeal of waking up earlier than the morning coffee could kick in, meeting up with a bunch of strangers, *socializing*, and then exercising alongside the sunrise. He had thanked Billy the first time he'd asked him along, but swore that he'd never do it again.

And look at you now, Billy's spirit chuckled, That's a mighty fine High Lunge you've got going there.

I'm trying to concentrate here, thank you.

Dan breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth. Once again, he found himself envying those lucky, lucky people around the world who could clear their minds through blissful meditation or, hell, any sort of mind-numbing activity. Dan had only managed to achieve such peace through drinking; however, it wasn't as if he could go back to that again. But sometimes... sometimes he found it tempting, because every time he tried to empty his thoughts, that was when the spirits all decided to move in.

Billy hovered in front of him, sitting cross-legged in the air.

It had been over five years since he'd died and he still looked the same. Those sad, soulful eyes that could see right through a man and, yet, held such an overwhelming kindness to them that it was heart-breaking had never once dampened. This was the man that had reached out to him during his lowest point; and, here he was now, still trying to keep himself from sinking deep down into the hole he'd dug.

You can't keep doing this, Daniel.

Billy, please.

I'm concerned, Billy frowned, How many times are you going to keep running away? When are you going to finally settle down and let yourself

heal? You can't keep doing this to yourself. It's not going to make the pain go away.

*I'm **not** running. Not anymore. Dan grimaced , And, frankly Billy, I'm getting tired of this conversation. I moved out here because I needed to face everything I've done, not because I'm trying to forget it. I owe it to everyone I failed, to all the years I wasted. I need to give back to the world instead of taking away from it... I... I have to do this.*

Have to, Daniel? Or want to? Billy's frown deepened, Seems pretty secluded up here to me.

That's where you're wrong.

Billy's spirit disappeared.

But hundreds of thousands of others took his place. The Grady Twins. Jack Torrance, clinging onto a bottle of whiskey. A new mother rocked her infant son to sleep. A young girl with violet flowers braided into her hair played ring-around-the-rosie with a boy wearing a dirtied baseball uniform. The newest phantom, a boy in a yellow raincoat, slipped his freezing hand into his. Dan met Georgie's eyes, shining bright in the morning light.

Everyone thought that he was isolating himself; but, that was impossible. Dan was never alone, and that was the *problem*.

Pennywise's face filled his vision.

"What's up, Doc?" he drawled and bit into an apple, "You stuck?"

The spirits disappeared.

"What?"

"Seriously? Look. I don't know pretty much anything about yoga, but I'm fairly certain that you're supposed to do different poses... not stay in the same one for five entire minutes," Pennywise explained slowly, rolling his eyes, "And, while I appreciate the view, I'm starting to get concerned over here."

Dan slipped into a resting position.

"That's better," Pennywise sat down in front of him, taking another bite of his apple, "You know, I never would've thought you as the type to do yoga."

"I thought you didn't eat."

"Changing the subject, Doc?"

"I do this because I have to, not because I want to. I hate exercising," Dan answered with a sigh and repeated, "I thought you didn't eat normal food."

"I can eat," Pennywise emphasized his point with another bite, "I just... don't gain anything from it unless it's alive and struggling."

"Do you enjoy it?"

"Enjoy what?"

"Having to eat the way that you do," Dan said, "Feeding on fear and suffering."

Pennywise paused.

"Yes."

"*Jesus*," Dan covered his face, smoothing them down his chin, "I've encountered people like you before. Maybe not exactly like you, but similar enough. People who would kidnap and torture kids for hours. *Hours*, Pennywise. Little kids like... like..."

Dan swallowed.

"They tried to feed off Abra. They *did* feed off me."

"I'm sorry," Pennywise said quietly.

And the strangest thing was, it almost sounded like he meant it.

"What I don't understand is why," Dan hoisted himself onto his feet, "Is immortality really that compelling that you'd be willing to torture children for the rest of your life? Is it really that great? Because I

don't see the appeal."

"Honestly? No."

Pennywise stood up.

"I'm not a good person, Doc, don't get me wrong. I've learned to enjoy what I do. But I wouldn't have chosen this life if I'd had any say in the matter," he said, "Like you said, who would want to eat children?"

"But you still do it," Dan pointed out.

"But I still do it."

"Why?"

"Necessity mostly. Well... there's that and, if I didn't do it myself, then Tippet would do it for me," Pennywise gazed off into the depths of the forest and took a bite of his apple, "Don't forget: I'm not just one person, Doc. I don't get the only say in what I do. I'm eating for two here. Even if I starved myself and tried to be all noble-hearted, Tippet would get all grumpy... and let's just say that it's way more humane if I'm the one doing the eating."

"I'm sorry," Dan said quietly.

And the strangest thing was, it almost sounded like he meant it.

Rebuilding the Overlook brought Dan more comfort than he could have ever predicted.

He knew every inch of the hotel. He knew every brick. He knew every beam and pipe. He knew the walls, the hallways, the unfinished ceiling. He even knew where every bolt and screw had been installed. With every piece he laid down, the more power he exerted over the puzzle.

He controlled the Overlook. The Overlook didn't have control over him.

Dan climbed up the ladder onto the second story roof and began work on closing up the floor. He wasn't much of an architect. He wasn't much of a construction worker. Hell, he wasn't much of a handyman. He was mostly just going off of old blueprints from the previous Overlook hotel, tweaking bits and pieces here and there to modernize the ancient building. The more he thought about it, the more he believed that he must have done something right to have gotten permission to even build here.

Of course, the Stones had played a big hand in that.

It was strange. As much as Dan had been balls-to-the-wall determined on ruining his life, he had always been exceptionally good at making connections. Some good ones, some bad. For example, the Overlook ghosts haunting him wherever he went? Bad. Rose the Hat and her band of Steam-Stealers? Very bad.

But Dick Hallorann? Good. Billy Freeman? Very good. Abra Stone? The best.

Pennywise? Jury was still out on that one.

It should have been an easy decision to make. The Steam-Stealers had been irredeemable. They had relished in the agony and torment that they had unleashed into the world. They had loved it. They had actively pursued it. They had chosen that way of life.

But, Pennywise was more complicated. While enjoying what he did presently, he had never wanted to become what he was. It didn't seem like he'd even had a choice in the matter. Even more confusing, it seemed that had he been given the option... he would have said *no*.

Dan had never been one for yoga, but he did it anyways because he needed to.

Of course, yoga and torturing people in order to feast on their steam were entirely different things altogether. They weren't even on the same spectrum. The two were incomparable, incompatible; and yet, Dan couldn't help but wonder... what would he have done if he'd been in Pennywise's position?

Either way, Dan couldn't focus on that now. He needed to focus on his work. He needed to focus on getting rid of this connection anchoring them together.

He closed his eyes and thrust his spirit outward.

Abra?

She was in the university gym, already in the middle of her daily run on the treadmill. Her phone was positioned in front of her, streaming *Spider-Man: Into the Spider Verse* with the volume turned up high. She put the video on pause and readjusted her headphones, pretending to take a call.

Hey, Uncle Dan. What's up? Abra grinned, Need me to pick up some iron?

Very funny. I need your help, Dan went and sat down on the empty exercise bike beside her , *I need you to look up psychic links. How they're forged. How to break them. More of the latter than the former, if you could.*

Done and done. What else do you need?

Looking up the name Edward Weiss would be great.

See, Abra grinned, Told you Pennywise wasn't his real name.

You've officially been awarded all the rights to a three paragraph 'I told you so' text, Dan couldn't help himself but smile, *I need records to go back to 1835, if you can. Maybe further. Center your search on Maine and any German immigrants that moved there.*

Got it. Anything else?

See if there were any traveling circus catastrophes around the same time.

I'll see what I can do. I've got an exam coming up this Wednesday, so don't expect anything until the end of the week, her smile wavered, *Unless it's urgent?*

No, I'm pretty sure I can handle everything until then.

Pretty sure? Or sure-sure?

Goodbye, Abra.

Stay safe, Uncle Dan.

Dan slammed back into his body and automatically groaned, stumbling forward. Projecting himself like that seemed to be taking more and more of a toll from him nowadays. Not just because of the scars, but because he was getting old. His body wasn't like what it used to be. Everything was getting slower. His shining, his reflexes... He wasn't one foot in the grave yet, but in a couple of decades...

The beams above him creaked.

Dan looked up.

Pennywise swung down.

"Howdy, Doc! I'm—"

Dan threw him halfway across the building with his shine.

And yet, somehow, Dan managed to push Pennywise away as much as he pulled. The invisible string between them glowed bright white, humming a tuneless song that seemed both foreign and vaguely familiar. It grew louder. It grew brighter. The heavy thrumming beat through his lungs and up his throat until finally, *mercily*, it reached a simultaneous supernova and crescendo.

It blinded him, throwing him down onto the first floor.

Throwing him back into the original Overlook.

Danny was hugging onto his mother, staring in wide-eyed terror at the bathroom door. The ivory paint had been seared into his memory like a brand to the brain. Somehow, even though he was six-years-old, he knew that he would never look at the color white again and not want to throw up for the next forty-five years.

In the distance, someone was chopping wood.

Danny was lifted up into the air and shoved out the bathroom window. He tumbled down the snow bank, falling onto his back.

He didn't understand why he was outside. If he was going to be outside, then he needed his winter boots and his new fire engine red coat. He needed his fuzzy cap. He needed his gloves. He especially needed his rainbow-striped scarf that his grandmother had sent him last Christmas. Danny's mother never let him outside in the snow without that. He needed to go back inside—

“Danny! *Run!* ”

He looked up.

“...Mommy?”

“Mommy's stuck, sweetheart,” she sobbed, glancing back over her shoulder. Danny had never seen her cry like that before. She never cried in front of him. “Run. Run and hide. Mommy will find you, okay? I promise. Now go, Danny... *Go!* ”

He ran.

He ran, even though he could hear his mother screaming.

Danny disappeared back into the Overlook and stumbled into the kitchen. That was where his friend Mr. Hallorann had been, so it had to be safe... right? Danny crawled into the cupboard underneath the sink. He didn't entirely understand what was going on. He didn't understand why his mother hadn't followed him outside the window. He didn't understand why he didn't have his rainbow-striped scarf.

“Danny! Come out, come out wherever you are!”

He didn't understand why he was so scared of his father.

“Hello? Is anybody there?”

What was Mr. Hallorann doing here? Danny reached out with his shine, glowing brighter than a summer's day. He didn't know what he was doing or how he was doing it, but he knew that he had to warn him. He had to make sure that he knew that he needed to run and

hide too, that his mother would find them and that everything would be okay.

But Danny hadn't reached him in enough time to tell him all this. He had reached him in enough time to watch him die.

Danny screamed and stumbled out of the cupboard down the stairs where Rose the Hat pounced on top of him. She was holding the axe now, not his father. Her grin was manic. She pressed the blade into his leg. Dan cried out in agony.

He remembered what it was like to be fed on by her.

He remembered what it was like to be fed on by *them*.

He remembered what it was like sinking his claws into his daughter's tiny belly, ripping out her intestines and tearing into them with his teeth. He remembered what it was like first tasting that decadent steam leaving her lips, and the intoxication that followed.

He remembered waking up and realizing in horror what he had done.

“...*Liesl? Mein mäuschen...?*”

“Doc!”

Pennywise's voice pulled him out of the blinding light.

They were both on the floor. Pennywise had him pinned, hands enlarged three times their normal size into frighteningly familiar claws and wrapped around Dan's wrists in an encapsulating grip. Black blood dripped up his forehead and disappeared into the sky.

“Who...was that man?” Pennywise gasped, out-of-breath.

Dan furrowed his brows.

“What man?”

“That man that was chasing us! I mean chasing me. I mean you—*Ugh*,” he rested his forehead against his, teeth grinding sharply together, “Who was he, Danny?”

“My father,” Dan’s mouth ran dry, “Who was that little girl, Pennywise?”

He froze.

“My daughter,” Pennywise swallowed, “My Liesl.”

“... *Jesus Christ...* ”

5. The Foundation

Dan and Pennywise sat together in silence.

Earlier that morning, he had packed himself a couple of snacks and an entire boxed lunch that he could munch on throughout the day without having to return to the lodge.

It wasn't like Dan hated his home. It wasn't like he couldn't have his lunches there. The problem was... Dan loved his home too much; and, the Overlook wasn't going to get anywhere closer to being done if he just lounged in bed all day reading a Louis L'Amour novel and playing *The Best of Johnny Cash* on his record player.

Hence why he and Pennywise were currently sipping on a couple of juice boxes: Fruit Punch for Dan, Apple for his companion.

"So... are we going to talk about what happened?" Dan asked, "Or are we just going to sit here?"

Pennywise couldn't look at him.

He *hadn't* looked at him for the past hour.

"I need a minute."

"Okay."

Dan's mind was running wild. Not only had his entire soul been bared to this relative stranger, not only had their psychic link run deeper than he could have ever imagined, but Dan had relived some of his worst possible memories. Mercifully, not all of them. He would've been shattered beyond repair if he'd had to relive an entire lifetime of his fuck-ups; but, the fact that the ones that he had relived were the first traumas he'd ever experienced fused into the last... well, the poetry hadn't been lost on him.

The worst thing was that he couldn't even claim that half the shock he'd experienced was because he had thought that he had put the past behind him. He wasn't that much of a fool. His past was what defined him. What he'd seen, what he could do... they all were what

had led him to the bottle in the first place.

And, he knew that.

The Overlook had haunted him. Dan had medicated himself in whiskey, much like how his father had drowned himself in liquor, because even though being drunk felt awful, he felt even worse without it. At least, being drunk meant that his shine didn't shine as bright. At least, being drunk meant that he couldn't see the death flies. At least, being drunk meant that he could ignore the ghosts, both the literal and the figurative, and forget.

Dan had never forgotten his past; however, having relived it in the exact manner of how it had happened was an entirely different story.

Dan's hands trembled, but it wasn't from the nerve damage.

And then there were the memories that weren't *his*.

Pennywise had a daughter. Pennywise had *had* a daughter.

"What happened to you, Doc?" Pennywise whispered, hanging his head low between his legs and still not looking at him, "What happened?"

"When I was six-years-old, my dad packed me and my mom up one day and brought us to the original Overlook Hotel for the winter. We were supposed to take care of it. We were supposed to be the only ones there," Dan grimaced, "We weren't."

"I thought that your father lost his marbles."

"He did," Dan confirmed and cast his gaze to the roof, "I think that the intent was always there... slithering underneath somewhere deep down, locked away. The hotel only gave it a little push. Somehow, that was all it took."

He clenched and unclenched his hand.

"It was a living thing, you know. The hotel," he said, "It was like an anglerfish luring people who shined into its mouth, trapping them inside to power its own light. The Overlook— It wanted me.

Desperately. But I wouldn't let it."

Dan sipped his juice.

"So they sent someone after me who could."

"Your father."

"He's still here. Wandering around... lost in a drunken stupor," Dan closed his eyes, "I thought you were him for a brief moment when you first walked out from behind that tree. Nearly gave me a heart attack."

"The red jacket," Pennywise realized, "I'll burn it tonight."

"Don't do that," he sighed, "It's a nice jacket. Probably expensive."

"Maybe, but it's worthless if it reminds you of him."

Dan looked at him for a long moment.

"God, I don't understand you," he eventually breathed, "I want to hate you, Pennywise. I really do. I probably should hate you... but, you're making it very hard for me to actually go ahead and do so."

Pennywise shifted, but still didn't look at him.

"...and who was that woman?"

Dan furrowed his brows.

"My mom?"

"No, not her," Pennywise said, low and quiet, "That woman who hurt you. Who was she?"

"Rose," Dan realized and conveniently took another long sip from his juice box, emptying its contents, "She was one of the people that was after Abra. I wouldn't let her. She didn't like that."

"You brought her to the Overlook."

"I did."

"Why?" Pennywise's knuckles turned white as he gripped his legs, "You knew the dangers of going back. Either that, or you were just that stupid. But I have a hard time believing that. I've been inside your head, Doc... and you're not dumb. Far from it."

"I had no other choice," he answered.

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't," Dan pressed his lips into a thin line, "I lured her to the one place she never would have expected. I lured her into a cage where she could be trapped. And, it *worked*."

"Yeah," Pennywise mumbled, "But, at what cost?"

Dan's hands ached.

"I stand by my decision," he said, "I would face the Overlook a thousand times over if it meant that Abra could be safe. She deserves as much."

Pennywise's grip loosened. He pressed his cheek against his knees now, looking away from him. Despite still refusing to meet his eye, this comforted Dan. It was progress. It was different. It was *something*.

"You're a good man, Doc."

"Mmm, I try," he hummed thoughtfully and shrugged, "Doesn't mean I am one."

"The mere fact that you *try* indicates otherwise."

"What about you?" Dan looked over at him, "What do you try to be?"

Pennywise stiffened.

"I try to live my life one day at a time," he answered slowly, "I try to keep moving forward, no matter how... *hard* it gets."

"I've been there," Dan sympathized, "Gets lonely, doesn't it?"

"I'm not like you, Doc," Pennywise growled lowly, either a warning

or a desperate plea, “The world seems like it’s out to get you. All it does is make you hurt. But me? I’m the one that does all the hurting.”

“Penny—”

“I killed my daughter,” he trembled, but his voice was sharp and cruel, “You saw it. You felt it. I want to say that it gets better from there. I want to say that I stopped after that. I want to say that I never hurt another kid. But I have. I have taken so many children away from their parents and I... I can’t stop. I want to. But, I can’t. That’s why I’ve learned to enjoy it. Because I’m stuck, Doc, and I can’t get out.”

Dan stood up.

“You’re a monster.”

Pennywise didn’t disagree.

“But... don’t forget. You’re also a man,” Dan offered him his hand, “Come on. I think we’ve been through enough for today. Let’s go home.”

Pennywise looked at him.

“Home,” he repeated slowly.

He slipped his hand into his.

“I like the sound of that.”

Dan escorted Pennywise back into the lodge.

He was lethargic to the *n*th degree, entirely devoid of all the normal manic energy that he usually exhibited. That wasn’t to say that Dan was intimately familiar with Pennywise and his habits. They had barely known each other for a day, and yet he knew enough about him to realize that this wasn’t normal. He knew enough to be concerned.

Dan pulled Pennywise into the lodge, closing the door behind him

with his shine.

He guided him onto the couch and left the room for a brief moment. Dan grabbed the bathrobe that Pennywise had stolen that morning, a book of crossword puzzles from the bathroom and the *RWBY Emerald* pen that Abra had left in the kitchen the last time she'd visited.

Dan tossed them onto the coffee table and held open the robe to Pennywise.

"Stand up."

Pennywise looked up at him, not moving.

"Stand up," Dan repeated, patient yet firm, "I'm not going to ask again."

Pennywise relented and allowed Dan to slip his arms through the oversized sleeves before plopping back down onto the couch. Dan shoved the book of crossword puzzles into his hands and clicked open the pen.

"What's this?" Pennywise mumbled.

"Puzzles," Dan answered, "Collection from the Washington Post, I think. I've got the first couple pages filled out, so start on page fifteen and work forwards from there."

Pennywise met his eye.

"I don't understand."

"Keeping my mind busy when the demons start closing in has always..." Dan shrugged, "Well, it hasn't *worked*, but it's close enough to peace that you can get. And for people like us, close enough is all that we can ask for."

"People like us?" Pennywise repeated, brows knitting together.

"You're not the only person with ghosts," Dan said, "I'm not the best person either."

And with that being said, Dan took advantage of that moment to excuse himself into the kitchen. He grabbed two mugs from the cabinet and made both him and Pennywise his mother's chocolate milk.

He wasn't entirely certain as to why he was doing this. Dan didn't need to be so polite and accommodating to a person who had literally barged into his life without invitation. He didn't need to be nice to someone who had committed the very same atrocities as Rose the Hat and her band of Steam-Stealers. He didn't need to be nice to someone who had probably done worse.

But that glowing string between them thrummed and told him: *yes, he didn't need to... but he **could**.*

Dan seated himself beside Pennywise and handed him a mug.

"You realize that these sorts of things don't do anything for me," he mumbled, accepting the mug, "Don't you?"

"Maybe so," Dan hummed, taking a sip, "But, you can still taste it, right?"

"But—"

"But, you can still *taste* it, right?"

"...Yes."

"Then drink," Dan leaned back and made himself comfortable, "You're allowed to do things for yourself, you know."

Pennywise turned quiet for a moment before sipping the chocolate milk. A faint smile crossed his lips. However, it wasn't a playful smirk or flirtatious grin or even a teasing laugh, but a smile that held no purpose or hidden connotations. It was just a smile.

A smile that wasn't meant for Dan, but for himself.

"It's good," Pennywise's face crumpled, "It's really good."

The mug slipped from his grip and rolled across the floor, spilling out

its contents. Dan couldn't help but be thankful that Azzie was too busy sleeping in his bed, basking in the afternoon light, otherwise she'd already be here trying to clean up his mess.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry—"

"It's no big deal," Dan stood up and set down his mug, "I can just go and grab a mop."

"I killed my daughter, Daniel."

"Oh," he sat back down, "I think the mop can wait."

"I killed her. You saw it. You saw how I slaughtered my own child," Pennywise covered his face with his hands, "I ripped open her little body. I feasted on her flesh. I gorged myself on her tiny eyes, her itty-bitty toes, her blood, her organs. I... **ate** her. I ate her while she was still alive and breathing."

Pennywise giggled.

"I didn't stop there either. I couldn't stop at her body. I had to have her soul too. Her steam was just too pure... too tantalizing... too *afraid* for me to resist. And she was so scared, Doc. She was terrified of me and I gobbled it all up," tremors ripped through his body, "I'm 214-years-old and I'm still not over it."

Something wet dripped down his cheek, leaking through his fingers and falling onto the floor.

"I don't... deserve to get over it," Pennywise's voice trembled, "But I don't deserve to feel bad either. I don't deserve to feel guilty or feel sorry for myself because I did it. I did it. I did it. *I did it.*"

"And you regret it."

"Of course I regret it!" Pennywise's head whirled around. His golden eyes were bloodshot and the entire left half of his face was ripped open at the scars. His exposed teeth and deformed lips transforming his voice from a lilting song into a hoarse growl. "She was the greatest thing to happen to me aside from— And I still... did that to her."

"I murdered a woman and her infant child."

Pennywise froze.

"Not directly... or maybe it was. I don't know. I don't remember much about what happened that night before waking up in her bed. Christ, I can't even remember her name," Dan leaned forward, resting his arms across his knees, "The woman aspirated in her sleep. Overdosed on whatever pills, drugs, and whatnot we'd taken. And I—I guess her kid had been sleeping in the other room. I hadn't even known she'd had one."

Dan rubbed his eyes.

"So, I gave him a snack and put him in bed next to his mother. I stole a couple of twenties from her purse and I... left. *I left*. I didn't call the police. I didn't leave the door open. I didn't even leave behind a note. I thought that someone would find them. I really thought they would," he confessed quietly, "Then two spirits started appearing in my bed."

"Doc—"

"It's not the same thing, I know. *I know*," he exhaled and looked at him, "But... someone took me in at my lowest point. No judgements. No questions. Just open arms and an understanding heart. Maybe it's about time that I did someone else the favor."

Pennywise's lower lip warbled and he slumped into his side. Dan didn't know how to react. He didn't know what Pennywise needed or what he wanted or whether Dan had to do anything at all except be there; so, he just slipped his arm around his shoulders and patted his back.

"You're too good, Doc."

"I'm really not."

Pennywise laughed quietly.

"*Precisely*."

Notes for the Chapter:

To all my American followers : Happy Thanksgiving and remember to support your local Native American charities.

For all my non-American followers : Happy Thursday.